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Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council
Seventy-third year

Identical letters dated 17 July 2018 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

I am compelled to write to you once again to draw your attention to the ongoing critical situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and more specifically, to the grave reality faced by Palestinian civilians as a direct result of the Israeli military occupation.

Israeli occupying forces carried out air strikes across the Gaza Strip on 13 July and continued them overnight, culminating on 14 July in Israel's largest daytime air strike campaign in the besieged enclave since its 2014 aggression on the territory that killed more than 2,200 Palestinians.

Two Palestinian children, Amir al-Nimra, age 15, and Louay Kaheil, age 16, were killed by an Israeli missile as they were playing on the roof of the Katiba building, a large, unoccupied and unfinished concrete structure in the heart of Gaza City located next to a park often visited by Palestinian families during the summertime. Amir and Louay were best friends, described as "like twin brothers", who grew up on the same street in central Gaza. Louay was killed by a hit to the head and back and Amir died as a result of shrapnel puncturing his entire body.

Heavy shelling by Israeli warplanes in various areas in Gaza also resulted in injuries to at least 25 other Palestinians and damage to ambulances and civilian structures, including a mosque and an arts and crafts centre. Bombs caused loud explosions in civilian areas, clearly intended to further terrorize the civilian population.

Such a brutal and criminal campaign against the population of Gaza and Israel's deliberate targeting and killing of Palestinian children are nothing new, following instead a pattern of wilful killings of Palestinian civilians, including children, throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with total impunity.

Indeed, the cold-blooded killings of Amir and Louay are a tragic reminder of the murder by Israeli air strikes four years ago yesterday, on 16 July 2014, of nine

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children, including four brothers and cousins of the Baker family, as they were playing on the beach in Gaza City.

Israel's ongoing wilful killing of Palestinian civilians and its cruel and callous disregard for human life were also demonstrated during the "Great Return March" protests in Gaza on 13 July, as the occupying Power continued its vicious slaughter of defenceless peaceful protesters, fatally wounding two Palestinians, Othman Rami Hillis, age 15, and Muhammad Nasir Shurab, age 20, and injuring more than 100, including 65 by live ammunition. This brings the total number of Palestinians killed since 30 March to nearly 150, including 22 children, and the total number of injured to approximately 15,300.

Here we recall that Palestinian civilians in Gaza are protesting against the unbearable conditions that the Palestinian people have been facing for the past 70 years, including 70 years of dispossession, a 51-year occupation and a more than 11-year illegal and inhumane blockade.

As Palestinians in Gaza maintain their protest against this brutal blockade, Israel's morally depraved response has been to tighten the blockade and exacerbate the collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population even further.

On 9 July, the Netanyahu Government decided to seal off the Kerem Shalom crossing, the only commercial crossing of goods in and out of Gaza, cutting off vital supplies and banning all exports from Gaza, putting thousands of jobs at risk, causing prices of essential materials to surge and compounding the devastating humanitarian situation already rampant in the Gaza Strip, where 49 per cent of Palestinians are unemployed. Of the goods that would normally enter Gaza, 55 per cent are now being denied entry under the new restrictions, including construction materials, furniture, wood, electronics, fabric, clothing, blankets and generators. Among the imports banned by Israel are truckloads of building materials for United Nations agencies designated for education, health and water, sanitation and hygiene projects.

According to Chris Gunness, a spokesperson for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), these Israeli restrictions "can be expected to have profound and far reaching consequences for already desperate civilians" and will lead to an increase in demand for UNRWA services. In this regard, we appeal to all States to continue their vital humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, especially during this period of crisis in which Gaza is heading towards complete economic and social collapse, and to increase their support to UNRWA, which, besides humanitarian aid, stands for hope and respect for rights and dignity, which is so crucial given the absence of a solution and the growing despair and uncertainty about the future.

Against this backdrop of criminal activity in Gaza, there is also a continuing trend of attacks and incitement by extremist and terrorist Israeli settlers in the West Bank. While it is nearly impossible to document every violation, the examples below provide just a glimpse of the types of violations that the Palestinian people are enduring daily as a result of settler violence.

On 10 July, in full view and under the protection of Israeli occupying forces, extremist Israeli settlers blocked an ambulance carrying a Palestinian patient in Al-Khalil (Hebron). On the same day, extremist Israeli settlers escorted by Israeli occupying forces stormed the Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Jerusalem, the latest in a series of about 100 attacks carried out by settlers against the mosque in the past two months. So-called terrorist "price tag" attacks have also continued to terrorize the Palestinian civilian population, including the spraying of anti-Palestinian racist graffiti, the puncturing of car tyres, the uprooting of hundreds of olive trees and countless cases of harassment and assault against Palestinian civilians.

We reiterate our condemnation of these heinous crimes and continue to hold the Government of Israel responsible for the violence sustained by innocent civilians as well as the culture of hate and violence that it continues to foster through the imposition of its endless, illegal policies and practices, which include the transfer of illegal settlers to illegal settlements throughout the Occupied State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem.

We call again for immediate measures to hold accountable all settlers committing crimes against the Palestinian people. Impunity for Israeli settlers cannot continue to be the norm, and the international community must demand that Israel uphold its obligations to investigate all such crimes and hold the perpetrators accountable. Terrorism in all its forms must be unequivocally condemned and ceased.

Here, we recall with sorrow the heinous crime perpetrated three years ago in the same month of July against the Dawabsha family in Duma, when a group of terrorist Israeli settlers threw firebombs into the family's home, burning alive Ali, an 18-month-old baby, as he slept in his bed, and severely burning his mother and father, Reham and Sa'ad, who later died from their wounds. We highlight that the Israeli Government has systematically failed to redress the grievance and to hold the responsible Israeli terrorist settlers accountable for this attack, instead deciding this morning to release one of the terrorist settlers suspected of planning the terror attack.

Israel's systematic and deliberate campaign of brutalizing and terrorizing innocent Palestinians is part and parcel of its overall colonial strategy to achieve ethnic purity and prolong the occupation and its ongoing system of ethnic cleansing that ultimately seeks to superimpose all of "Greater Israel" on all of historic Palestine and eradicate any hopes of return for Palestine refugees.

While actions on the ground have revealed for decades Israel's colonial and discriminatory project, through its attempts to expel and replace the Palestinian population and Judaize space, on 16 July the Israeli Knesset deliberated on the final draft of so-called "legislation" that would define Israel as "the nation-state of the Jewish people", explicitly endorsing apartheid and colonialism by establishing ethnic discrimination and racist acts against Palestinians as a constitutional mandate and enshrining the ethnic supremacy of Jews over Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinian residents of Jerusalem. This so-called "law" would establish ideological beliefs as official policy and require discrimination against Palestinians in the fields of citizenship, property and land, language and culture, in explicit violation of peremptory norms of international law, international humanitarian law, the prohibition against colonialism and the most basic fundamental principles of human rights and democracy that staunchly oppose racism.

As long as the world remains silent, Israel's brutal colonial and ethnic cleansing campaign against innocent Palestinians will only continue. We urge all members of the international community, as well as all relevant organizations, to intervene immediately and to exhibit the moral and political courage necessary to put an end to Israel's unlawful and immoral behaviour, including the illegal occupation of Palestinian land and the suffocating blockade of Gaza, in blatant violation of the occupying Power's obligations under international law, and to put an end to Israel's long-standing impunity for international crimes.

We also reiterate our call for the protection of the Palestinian people, for ensuring the safety and well-being of a defenceless civilian population being held captive under a more than half-century occupation. Failure to provide protection for the Palestinian people will lead to further escalation and tragically result in more bloodshed.

The present letter is in follow-up to our 641 previous letters regarding the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which constitutes the territory of the State of Palestine. These letters, dated from 29 September 2000 (A/55/432-S/2000/921) to 5 July 2018 (A/ES-10/790-S/2018/668), constitute a basic record of the crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people since September 2000. For all of these war crimes, acts of State terrorism and systematic human rights violations being committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators brought to justice.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter distributed as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador, Permanent Observer
of the State of Palestine to the United Nations